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SUBJECT: TURKEY NOT LIKELY AFFECTED BY LEBANON OIL SPILL

REF: LONDON 5867

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. Contrary to alarmist press reporting in Turkey, a variety of assessments assign a low probability to the Lebanon oil spill reaching Turkey. Still, the possibility cannot be excluded, in which instance Turkey might need assistance for cleanup. Turkey has improved its legislation and capacity for oil spill response, but it still has significant constraints and is a work in progress. Turkey would rely on industry and other outside help -- including potentially from the USG -- to cope with any serious oil spill cleanup. End Summary.

LOW PROBABILITY OF REACHING TURKEY

¶2. (SBU) Although the oil spill is a calamity for Lebanon and potentially for Syria (reftel), it appears unlikely that it will affect Turkey. Middle East Technical University Marine Sciences Institute President Sukru Besiktepe, who works closely with the IMO's Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Center (REMPEC) in Malta, estimated that 80% of the oil slick was on Lebanon beaches, 19% evaporated, and 1% on the water. He believed that oil which had been detected and mitigated on Syrian beaches was mainly due to illegal discharge from ships at sea.

¶3. (SBU) London-based Oil Spill Regional Preparedness Initiative (OSPRI) (affiliated with the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association) Manager Peter Taylor told us that the most current modeling predicted no impact on Turkey. Therefore, the risk to Turkey was low, but not zero. He said that satellite images -- albeit imperfect indicators -- corroborated

this. Overflights would normally provide better information, but this was impossible in Lebanon. He said that a UNEP/OCHA/IMO/REMPEC expert mission had mitigated some oil in Syria, but that the source was unclear. Taylor noted that the heavy fuel oil spilled after the bombing of the al-Jiyah power plant was particularly harmful and persistent in the environment. He said that in the event the spill reached Turkey, it would be very difficult to combat on the water when it is weeks old and fragmented. Instead, shore crews would have to be used.

14. Turkey Coast Guard Commander Admiral Can Erenoglu confirmed to us that there was not an imminent threat to Turkey from the 10-15,000 tons spilled in Lebanon. He indicated that there had been no request for assistance to Turkey from Lebanon or Syria. Erenoglu said that the Coast Guard had primary responsibility for pollution at sea caused by vessels.

LOCAL CLEANUP CAPABILITIES LIMITED

15. (SBU) Noting Turkey's pivotal role in oil transport, Taylor said that OSPRI had worked closely with both Turkey and the regional Black Sea Commission (littoral states environmental group) on training and oil spill response readiness. He observed that the Malta-based REMPEC was much more mature than the Black Sea Commission. Taylor said that Turkey had passed new domestic legislation, was preparing a National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, and was working on secondary regulation. (While the Ministry of Environment and Forestry has overall responsibility for pollution, oil on water is effectively delegated to the Undersecretariat for Maritime Affairs' Coastal Protection and Emergency Action Department.) METU's Besiktepe said that the new BTC port facility at Ceyhan had equipment and trained personnel that could offer help. They have worked together with the GOT on joint drills. BP told us

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that the BTC equipment was limited to "tier one", meaning intended for immediate response to an isolated tanker spill, versus "tier three" - a larger, dispersed oil spill - which would presumably be the need if the Lebanon spill reached Turkey.

16. (SBU) A number of industry and NGO contacts pointed out that Turkey's oil spill response structure is still new and untested as the Maritime and Environment structures learn to work together. In the event of a serious spill, Turkey would rely on the help of industry and outside resources. Taylor said that expertise could be available from a number of locations, but the closest significant stock of emergency equipment was in the UK. He said that at the time of the 1999 earthquake and damage to the Izmit Refinery, BP mobilized expertise and equipment from the UK to respond.

RISK TO WILDLIFE

17. (SBU) A reputable Turkish environmental NGO "Doga Dernegi" told us that a potential oil spill in Turkey's Mediterranean coast would affect large areas and a number of species. He pointed out that Iskenderun Bay was a significant habitat for Mediterranean (Ak Deniz) seals and the Seyhan-Ceyhan and Goksu Deltas were major migratory stops for rare birds. The NGO rep admitted that there was weak cooperation and preparation among environmental NGO's.

COMMENT: OUTSIDE HELP WOULD BE NEEDED

18. (SBU) Comment: Given U.S. global leadership in oil spill response, USG assistance in organizing a response, potentially calling on U.S. assets and experts, could be useful in the event that oil reaches Turkish shores. Post will keep abreast of developments and reach out to the Department as necessary.

WILSON